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El Malpais National Monument News Release

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El Malpais Bird Monitoring Program Finds 100th Species for 2012

The sighting of a calliope hummingbird (*Stellula calliope*) near Bandera Crater on Highway 53 in El Malpais National Monument proved to be a significant milestone for 2012, as it was the 100th bird species observed in the monument this year. “This hummingbird is the smallest bird in North America and its Latin name, *Stellula*, means “little star,” inspired by the streaked red throat feathers on male birds,” said Natural Resources Branch Chief David Hays.

Although the bird is seen occasionally in the area, it is not common, according to Hays. “It typically breeds in the mountainous areas of the Pacific Northwest and California, but it winters in Mexico and it passes through this area during migration,” he said.

Bird species monitoring began at El Malpais in January 2011, and remains an ongoing activity. “We have several volunteers that assist with the weekly monitoring and we are always looking for more folks who would be interested,” said Hays. “We are now including a survey down Hwy 53, as well as continuing with our regular survey down New Mexico Highway 117.”

Hays said the expanded survey to the west side of the monument is important. “Whereas the east side of the monument has the sandstone bluffs and cliffs, which provide a perfect habitat for soaring raptors and others like swifts and swallows, there are many species that prefer a more forested habitat,” he said. “That is exactly what the west side of the monument offers, so we should be able to increase the number of species observed and tracked.”

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